

PATENT APPLICATION

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**APPLICATION FOR
UNITED STATES LETTERS PATENT**

TO ALL WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

Be it known that we Michael W. Allen, residing at 83 Booth St, Shortsville, NY 14548, and Robert J. Kolbet residing at 3332 Eagles Roost Lane, Macedon, NY 14502, both citizens of the United States, have invented an

ENCAPSULATED ELECTRONIC POWER CONVERTER WITH
EMBEDDED AC COMPONENTS

ENCAPSULATED ELECTRONIC POWER CONVERTER WITH EMBEDDED AC COMPONENTS

This invention relates generally to a power converter, and more particularly to an encapsulated, self-contained converter having alternating current (AC) input 5 circuitry therein and directly connected to an AC line source, said converter being directly mountable and electrically connected to the direct current (DC) circuitry of the associated device and/or printed circuit board.

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CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

15 Priority is claimed from the following provisional patent application, which is also hereby incorporated by reference, in its entirety, for its teachings:

“ENCAPSULATED ELECTRONIC POWER CONVERTER WITH EMBEDDED AC COMPONENTS,” by Allen et al., filed August 4, 2003, Application No. 60/492,439.

BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Chassis-mounted power supplies are known to include external power 20 connectors and wiring harnesses to connect them to device components and printed circuit boards (PCBs). These chassis-mounted supplies are generally complete supplies, including inrush limiting circuitry, EMI filtering, etc., but have the unfortunate consequence of requiring a cable or wiring interface to the printed circuit board.

Similarly, PCB mountable power converters are used that include standard pins to connect to input power provided on a printed circuit board. These devices require high-voltage traces on the printed circuit board to conduct power from an

independent AC connector. These supplies also provide almost no inrush current limiting functionality, and may or may not have sufficient EMI filtering. As is well understood, the EMI characteristics of the device in which the power supply is used may be negatively impacted by the use of AC traces or wiring, and the 5 characteristics of the power supply employed. As a consequence the user must provide an external power connector and make the necessary high-voltage connections on the printed circuit board. Also, the user is typically required to provide some form of inrush current limiting circuitry to protect internal fusing and minimize stresses on the circuitry in such supplies. The additional circuitry and 10 components required to use such supplies may also impact safety agency approval and certification.

As a solution to the inherent problems with existing power supplies, the present invention incorporates improved packaging and design, along with specific 15 circuits that are essential to optimize the benefits of an integrated and encapsulated power converter, whereby all components are contained within a common enclosure. Consequently, it has been determined that once the power supplying components are contained within a common enclosure it is highly desirable to encapsulate the entire power supply to provide environmental protection and immunity to dirt, moisture and vibration. The encapsulant also preferably provides a 20 thermally conductive pathway to dissipate the generated heat of the power switching transistors, rectifier and the transformer. Furthermore encapsulation with a material having a high dielectric constant allows the components to be placed in closer proximity, while maintaining requirements relating to safety and certification.

Therefore, it is apparent that an integrated, encapsulated power converter 25 (EPC) that is mounted on-board, provides a solution to a long standing problem, as mentioned above. In a preferred embodiment, the power converter also has a direct connection to the AC line voltage, thereby eliminating the need for AC wiring within the device. However, in order to take full advantage of this solution, specific circuitry 30 limitations must be addressed. For example, encapsulation limits the ability to replace or reset a fuse or similar safety component within the power module.

Accordingly, the circuit design of the present invention is specifically designed to limit excessive current and avoid premature component failure.

It is therefore an object of the invention to provide a highly reliable fully integrated power module that controls the in-rush current and associated voltage 5 stress on the bridge rectifier, line fuses and semiconductor switches.

In accordance with an aspect of the present invention, there is provided an electronic power converter, comprising: an encapsulated portion including at least high-voltage electronic circuitry; and an integrated connector for receiving a detachable line cord having at least two wires therein, wherein said power converter 10 is suitable for mounting on a printed circuit board.

In accordance with another aspect of the present invention, there is provided an electronic encapsulated power converter, comprising: a case; an integrated, multi-pin detachable line cord connector accessible through said case; and threaded mounts extending from said case, wherein the threaded mounts are earth grounded 15 internal to the supply and through a line cord, and allow the converter to be rigidly mounted to a circuit board.

In accordance with yet another aspect of the present invention, there is provided an encapsulated power converter having an inrush current limiting circuit, said inrush current limiting circuit, including: a rectifier with a DC return path; a 20 MOSFET switch connected to the DC return path of the bridge rectifier; a capacitor which is slowly charged via a current limited source; where the charge stored on the capacitor is a source of energy to gate the MOSFET; a voltage level detection circuit to maintain the MOSFET switch in an off state until a line voltage reaches a near zero threshold; a resistive charging path to turn the MOSFET switch to an on state 25 once the line voltage reaches the near zero threshold; and a resistive connection to a housekeeping supply of the power converter which maintains the MOSFET switch in the on state.

In accordance with a further aspect of the present invention, there is provided an electronic device, comprising; at least one circuit board located within the device; 30 a cover enclosing the electronic device; and an electronic power converter including fully encapsulated electronic circuitry; and an integrated connector, accessed

through an aperture in said cover, for receiving a detachable line cord having at least two wires therein, wherein said power converted is mounted on said circuit board.

The techniques described above are advantageous because they improve the long term reliability and operational characteristics and simplify the overall design of 5 AC powered electronic equipment. As a result of the invention, it is possible to incorporate integrated power supply componentry into a device without the need to handle AC wiring or switching. Moreover, the life cycle of a discrete, encapsulated power supply with integrated AC components has been improved by adding circuitry to safeguard the high failure power components from excessive electrical stress and 10 at the same time protect the user from exposure to potentially lethal AC line voltage.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The above and other objects, features and advantages of the present invention will become more clearly understood from the following detailed description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which:

15 Figure 1 is an illustrative example of the application of the present invention in an electrical device;

Figures 2A – 2C are exemplary embodiments for the power converter in accordance with the present invention;

20 Figure 3 is a block diagram illustrating the components of a switching power converter with an integrated AC section in accordance with the invention;

Figures 4A and 4B are circuit schematic diagrams illustrating inrush voltage management components; and

Figures 5 and 6 are exemplary schematic illustrations of ON/OFF and low line voltage circuits employed as an aspect of the present invention.

25 The present invention will be described in connection with a preferred embodiment, however, it will be understood that there is no intent to limit the invention to the embodiment described. On the contrary, the intent is to cover all alternatives, modifications, and equivalents as may be included within the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

For a general understanding of the present invention, reference is made to the drawings. In the drawings, like reference numerals have been used throughout to designate identical elements.

5 In accordance with one embodiment of the present invention rectified AC is supplied to a power converter which in turn produces DC output to power an associated device. For example, as Figure 1 illustrates, the electronic power converter 100 may be incorporated within an electronic device 90, and may be directly connected to the printed circuit board 92 of the device. Mounting of the
10 converter 100, as illustrated, may be using screws 94 or similar fasteners, possibly providing a system ground path therethrough. Alternative mounting and grounding possibilities are illustrated in Figures 2A – 2C. The converters depicted in Figures 2B and 2C include an AC input in the form of a standard IEC female-type connector 104, and in an alternative embodiment as illustrated in Figure 2A, AC power may be
15 provided via pins 105. As illustrated in Figure 1, AC power is supplied to the converter via a line cord 102, having a conventional AC plug on one end thereof (suitable for use with various AC outlets as may be found worldwide). The opposite end of line cord 102 would have a modular plug 96 (male) that fits within connector 104.

20 Turning briefly to Figures 2A – 2C, the various configurations of the converter are illustrated. Figure 2A illustrates a “drop-in” configuration, where the converter may be employed with a printed circuit board or device having AC power available therein. Accordingly, pins 105 may be used for power input (AC) and pins 110 may be used for power output (DC).

25 Figure 2B illustrates a 2-pin device where a 2-pin modular connector 104 is incorporated within the design so that AC power is made available directly to the converter and is contained within the converter. Such a design is believed to be advantageous, as set forth above, to avoid the need for handling AC power within the device or printed circuit board design. Similarly, Figure 2C illustrates a 3-pin
30 device suitable for including a ground connection in association with the AC lines.

Representative specifications for devices such as those depicted in Figures 2A – 2C are presented in Exhibits A – C, respectively, attached hereto.

As illustrated in Figures 1 and 2A – 2C, the present invention contemplates a converter that comprises electronic componentry, at least a portion of which is encapsulated. In one embodiment, the encapsulated portion includes at least the high-voltage, AC electronic circuitry. As is also depicted, the converter includes an integrated connector 104 for receiving a detachable line cord having at least two wires therein. And, the power converter is suitable for mounting on a printed circuit board 92 within an electronic device 90.

10 The encapsulate utilized for an embodiment of the present invention may be a number of types of encapsulating materials, including epoxies, urethanes, silicones. For example, a rigid, two-part epoxy mixed in an appropriate ratio. The encapsulated portions of the power converter are preferably assembled and are then cleaned and inserted within a housing. The housing is preferably a plastic or similar 15 polymer, such as a diallyl phthalate material, but may be any suitable housing made of other materials, including metals. Once installed in the housing, the components are covered with the encapsulating material and the assembly is placed under a vacuum in order to draw air out of any pockets or voids within the assembled components. The encapsulating material is then allowed to cure before the 20 converter is tested.

Turning next to Figure 3, there is depicted a general block diagram for the present invention. Within power converter 100, there is an AC section 302 and a DC section 304. As described briefly above, the AC section of the converter 100 receives AC input voltage directly through socket 104, which is connected to the AC 25 outlet by means of a detachable line cord 102. The AC voltage is then passed through the current overload fuses 108 to the electro-magnetic interference filter 106 which suppresses any noise in the power line. Output of the EMI filter 106 is provided to the full wave bridge rectifier 110. At this point the inrush current controller 112, holds back on the input voltage from line 102 until such a time when 30 the incoming AC voltage is near zero. At that time, circuit 112, connects capacitor(s)

130 to the bridge rectifier, allowing capacitor(s) 130 to charge with the rising sinusoidal voltage waveform.

Once capacitor 130 is charged, the switching controller 114 turns on and begins applying an AC waveform to the primary windings of transformer 118. The 5 controller also provides a signal to keep the inrush controller 112 on. The transformer 118 is constructed in such a manner so that the ratio of turns from the primary to the secondary will provide the required DC voltage level at the output voltage. Although a forward switch mode topology may be preferable, it is possible to use flyback, resonant, half-bridge or other standard topologies. The power supply 10 control circuit 122 allows the supplied device 120 to monitor the voltage and control the on/off state of the power supply 100.

Turning next to Figures 4A and 4B, there are illustrated two alternative circuits for inrush control 112. In one embodiment, the inrush current limiting circuit includes a rectifier with a DC return path 410. The MOSFET switch 416 is, in turn, connected 15 to the DC return path of the bridge rectifier. The inrush circuit 112 also includes a capacitor 420 that is charged via a current limited source at a rate which is much slower than the AC line frequency. The voltage on this capacitor provides a source of charge for gating the MOSFET switch 416. A voltage level detection circuit 430 is employed to maintain the MOSFET switch 416 in an off state until the line voltage 20 reaches a near zero threshold at which time a resistive charging path turns the MOSFET switch to an on state. Finally, a resistive connection to the HOUSE_KEEPING_SUPPLY of the switching controller 114 maintains the MOSFET switch 416 in the on state. With respect to Figure 4B, it will be appreciated that an alternative connection for the current source may be employed. The topology 25 described herein is believed to be applicable to devices for which power may be supplied using standard line cord current. It will be appreciated, however, that additional power ranges, and or multiphase inputs may be employed with modified versions of the circuitry described herein.

Having described, in general, the components and operation of the AC or 30 high-voltage portion (302) of the power converter, attention is now turned to certain aspects of the DC circuitry (304). In particular, the power converter further includes

a secondary side, isolated low voltage ON/OFF function 510. In one embodiment, the function is implemented by circuitry as depicted in Figure 5. An auxiliary winding of transformer 118 is used to provide power for an ON/OFF circuit. Diode 526 and capacitor 514 form a peak detector and the capacitor 514 is charged in each cycle to 5 a voltage that is directly proportional to the input line voltage. Voltage regulator 516 limits the peak voltage at the ON/OFF pin 520 to typical logic level voltages. By grounding the ON/OFF pin 520, a sufficient current flows through opto-coupler 512, which turns off the switching controller 114.

The circuit of Figure 5 can provide an isolated low input voltage sense 10 capability for the user by using a higher breakdown voltage for zener diode 524. Such a function will allow a user to sense when the power is going down. The voltage at the ON/OFF pin will now be proportional to the input line voltage up to the point where the zener diode 524 conducts. For example, suppose that the rated line voltages are between 90 VAC and 240 VAC, with operation possible at a brownout 15 level of 85 VAC and a worst case peak of 265 VAC. The voltage on capacitor 118 could range from approximately 60V to 380V with various line and loads. For a transformer turns ratio of 112:12 and for a 0.7V forward diode drop, the voltage on the capacitor 514 will range from approximately 5.7V to 40V. If the zener diode 524 has a threshold of 6.8V, the minimum voltage at the ON/OFF pin is 5.7V minus 0.7V 20 (for transistor base emitter drop) minus 1.3V (opto-coupler LED), equal to 3.7V. Voltages below this level indicate that the primary voltage has dropped below the rated values.

Referring to Figure 6, a low voltage indicator signal for the encapsulated power converter can also be implemented by sensing the peak voltage on capacitor 25 514, comparing the sensed voltage to a fixed threshold (REF voltage) and transmitting a logic level compatible or open collector signal to the user on an independent pin 620. As will be further appreciated from the various functions described above in Figures 5 and 6 may be combined to provide the isolated low voltage ON/OFF function and a low voltage sense function.

30 In recapitulation, the present invention is a method for improving the implementation and capabilities of an AC to DC power supply when an on board

drop in DC power source is required. The inventive combination of integrated AC components with a detachable power cord, along with reliability improvements that minimize electrical stress from inrush, over and under voltage situations has provided a significant advancement in power supply packaging.

5 It is, therefore, apparent that there has been provided, in accordance with the present invention, a method and apparatus for supplying DC power to a printed circuit board assembly that addresses a previously unanswered need in the electronics industry for fully self-contained and integrated drop-in AC to DC power supplying solution. While this invention has been described in conjunction with
10 preferred embodiments thereof, it is evident that many alternatives, modifications, and variations will be apparent to those skilled in the art. Accordingly, it is intended to embrace all such alternatives, modifications and variations that fall within the spirit and broad scope of the appended claims.